

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Program  
Foreign Service Spouse Series

MARTHA A. RAU

Interviewed by: Pam Stratton

Initial interview date: September 13, 1997

Q: This is Pam Stratton and I'm interviewing Martha Rau at 5125 MacArthur Boulevard in the AAFSW [Association of American Service Women] Offices and the date is September 13, 1997.

We are going to start out this morning, hopefully, talking about the early years that preceded your entry into the Foreign Service with your husband Don, and I would very much like to know how you met your husband. Could you tell us that Martha?

RAU: Well, we both come from a small town in Wisconsin, but had never known each other until one evening he was home from college and I had just graduated from nurses training and we happened to meet each other in a bar. And he followed me home and I guess it was love at first sight.

Q: And had he already joined the Foreign Service at that point?

RAU: He was at the University of Florida. He completed his four year college degree in three years and was just getting ready to join the Foreign Service.

Q: And so then you became engaged? Or how quickly did you marry after you met.

RAU: About a year.

Q: And at the time you married had he been inducted in the Foreign Service yet?

RAU: No, we married when he finished his last year at college. I worked at the hospital in Gainesville and he finished his last year at college and then we went up to Washington. And he'd already taken the Foreign Service Exam and had been accepted. So we started right in.

Q: When you say "went up to Washington and Gainesville" are we still talking Wisconsin?

RAU: No, I'm talking about Gainesville, Florida.

Q: So you somehow got from Wisconsin to college to Florida.

RAU: He was going to the University of Florida in Gainesville.

Q: I see. And then you moved there.

RAU: Yes, for a year.

Q: Okay. And then you came to the District in 1958 is that right?

RAU: That's correct.

Q: And he started out in Basic Training I assume at FSI.

RAU: That's correct.

Q: And how long did that last?

RAU: Almost two years we were in Washington.

Q: In Basic Training all that time?

RAU: Yes, pretty much. He was doing some consular work, but mostly just doing the Basic Training.

Q: And did you have an opportunity to take the Wives Seminar at FSI?

RAU: No, I, unfortunately, was working during this period.

Q: So you did not have the Wives Seminar or any protocol training before you went out?



RAU: No. There was a very handy little book, protocol book, that all wives were issued.

Q: Social Usage?

RAU: Of course. Our bible.

Q: And that became your bible.

RAU: Uh huh.

Q: Okay. And did you have any trouble like finding housing in those days? Where did you live?

RAU: Actually not. We got a little apartment across from the zoo on Connecticut Avenue and it was an easy commute for him and for me. And it wasn't a problem at all.

Q: So when you were assigned to Madras, your first post in 1960, did the assignment come as a surprise or were you in favor of it, of going there? How did you feel about getting told that your first assignment would be Madras?

RAU: Well my husband had worked as a Foreign Service Staff before he went to college in Dhaka, Pakistan, so he knew the area and had had really prepared me very well for what to expect in India and we really were both very excited about the assignment.

Q: And you said during that period he took language training.

RAU: In Madras, yes.

Q: And what language was that?

RAU: That was Tamil.

Q: And so did anything exciting happen during that assignment? It looks like it was only a six-month assignment.

RAU: Well, this was during the period that Kennedy was assassinated. Actually that's wrong. That was the second time we went to Madras. So, not really during language school except that we had a wonderful Consul General named Tom Simons, and he was our first introduction to the Foreign Service and protocol and what is expected of junior officers in the Foreign Service.

Q: India is known for being rather crowded and hot and things. Did you find you were able to adjust to that? Did you find housing?

RAU: Oh yes. There was - they had a house for us. Of course we had servants. And it was hot, but we were young and very independent and didn't have any children at the time. So we felt we could conquer anything.

Q: And so then in June of that year you went to Colombo. Why was that? What were you doing there?

RAU: Donald went as the Consular and Political Officer and we were there for three years. And it was one of the few places that he could use his Tamil language.

Q: I see. And, I understand that your daughter Gail was born in Colombo. What were the birthing facilities like? Was the medical assistance adequate?

RAU: They were very primitive. As one who is a nurse, I was appalled. You had to take all of your own medical supplies and baby clothes into the hospital with you. And Europeans did not go to the hospital, they went to a nursing home. And this is where they had usually English nurses, gals who would come out for two years and have their passage paid. And conditions were very, very primitive. In fact that's probably one of the reasons that we lost Gussie's sister, who was her twin, because the conditions were so bad. They really didn't have any incubators or any really good medical facilities at all.

Q: Were the girls premature or why did...

RAU: No, they were full term. But both needed to be forceps delivered and during the delivery, the first little twin received a very bad forceps injury. And she lived to be six weeks old, but unfortunately, the forceps injury was rather severe.



Q: That must have been a very difficult time for you. And I understand in addition to that, that the surroundings were somewhat upsetting because of the monks inciting people to riot during those time.

RAU: Yes, the Tamils and the Sinhalese were having a civil war and the Buddhist monks wanted the Sinhalese people to suppress the Tamils and in fact I think that must have been the beginning of what is still going on with the civil war in Sri Lanka.

Q: Getting back to the birth of your children, were you given a choice of where to go, or were you obliged to have the children there in Colombo.

RAU: No, we were not given any choice.

Q: So there wasn't any option.

RAU: Later on Bangkok, the 7th Day Adventist Hospital in Bangkok became an option if you were ill, but in that period there was no option available.

Q: So then, in 1962/63 you went back to Madras again, and that's where you told me that there was a story about the Kennedy assassination - the respect of the local people for the event that occurred.

RAU: Yes, my husband was Consular and Political Officer at the time and used to travel around south India a great deal. And during one particular week, he was out traveling on the west coast doing some of his consular work and one morning I received a phone call and the Indian voice said "Oh, Mrs. Rau, I am so sorry it is such sad news. I am so sorry for your loss." And I thought "Oh, my goodness something has happened to my husband." And I was there with a little six-month old baby and all by myself and I said "Sir, what are you talking about?" And he said, "Well, I'm just a friend of the United States and we have such respect for the United States, but this is so sad". And I said, "Who has died?" fearing it was my husband. And he said "Oh, President Kennedy." And I almost said, "thank God" in relief. But the Indian people really did have a lot of respect for the President and they set up a condolence book at the Consulate which a lot of people came and signed for days and days. And he had a lot of charisma for the Indian people.

Q: That's interesting. In addition to that, you were quite active, despite having a small child. In particular, you were the Membership Chairman of the American Women's Club. Can you tell us about that experience?



RAU: In those days the American Women's Club did a lot to welcome newcomers. We always had a welcome chairman, membership chairman who made sure that there were dishes and household bedding and everything in the quarters for the new arrivals when they got there. And we had various programs that we would present about various aspects of Indian life every month at our meeting. But the really big effort that was made was to make people feel welcome, the wives especially, feel welcome, and to take as much care of families as we could when they arrived in a place like this, because it was rather primitive and quite a shock to a lot of people who had not been overseas before.

Q: Had they prepared something for you when you arrived?

RAU: Actually, no. That's why I think I was responsible for getting the welcome kit organized. One of the bachelors at the Consulate welcomed us and was very sweet to us and took me to the market shopping and lent me some of his pots and pans and dishes. And I think it made such an impression on me I felt that someone else might not have such a nice bachelor available. So that's when I suggested that we have a welcome kit and to do this for new people.

Q: So it sort of started with your tenure.

RAU: I guess.

Q: Okay. And then this is very interesting to me that you became a volunteer at the Harijan Clinic - am I pronouncing it right? Would you correct me?

RAU: Well, yes, that's true. The Harijans were the untouchables in India and no one would have anything to do with them, particularly the Brahmans, so there was a clinic organized. We had a woman doctor, an Indian woman doctor and some of us would volunteer. We would get powdered milk to some of the young children; we examined the pregnant women and tried to encourage birth control as much as possible. We also administered a lot of medication for various ailments like worms or for dysentery, or any of the childhood diseases. We would get medication from the United States. People would donate some of the drugs. And it was a really interesting insight into the life of these people who were untouchable and could never aspire to be anything but street sweepers and toilet cleaners and things like that.

Q: With the passing of Mother Theresa this week, you must have a special sort of respect for the work she did in Calcutta with the poorest of the poor.



RAU: Yes, and she actually went out into the city. We were fortunate enough to have the people come to us in the clinic. And it was really amazing - they knew that they had to have the proper medical care and everything, but they weren't willing to practice any form of birth control. And so, we were sort of caught between how do we handle thirteen or fourteen children from one mother and still make sure that they were as healthy as they could be.

Q: Was it a religious prohibition or a moral prohibition? What was stopping them from using birth control?

RAU: Well in India, children are a form of social security. And so, the Indians always thought that as many children as possible would really insure their being looked after as they got older. And so, they also had a large death rate, mortality rate, among the children. So they would just have as many children as possible. That way they were going to be that much better taken care of in their old age.

Q: And what is the situation today? Have you followed it? Has it changed?

RAU: Yes, it has not changed that much. They are still trying to make inroads into birth control. But, unfortunately, they have a very male-dominated society. The women we could talk to and encourage to have birth control, but the men were almost a lost cause. They wanted nothing to do with birth control. At one point while we were there, the Indian Army actually gave away free radios if the enlistees in the Indian Army would have a vasectomy. But, this did not prove terribly successful either. So it is a constant battle and unfortunately, the men have the say. I think if the women were to choose, they would definitely choose not to have as many children and have them healthy.

Q: Did you come across any instances of bride burning, any violence against women?

RAU: Not as far as any violent behavior against the women. But you have to realize that the men really control everything and they make all the decisions and if - what would happen is one man would have three or four wives, that they were not married to, but women that he would impregnate and then move on to the next one and keep coming back among these women and getting them pregnant, and the women had no recourse as to being able to say no or I don't want to be pregnant or let's have fewer children. It was just the whole way of life and it had been that way for thousands of years.

Q: And yet women have risen in that country to lead the country.



RAU: But not in the lower castes, that is still very much tradition-bound. Yes the Brahmans, the upper class Indians, some of the women have prevailed but it's still arranged marriages, it's still the mother-in-law is very much in control of the marriage, things have changed slightly, but not in the lower castes.

Q: The men that would impregnate three or four women - was he supporting those three or four women?

RAU: No, this was the sad part. The women would have to go out and either, particularly the Harijan, the untouchables, they would have to go out and sweep the streets or clean toilets or go to people's houses and do the very, very menial work to support whatever children they had.

Q: Why would the women have sexual relations at all given those circumstances?

RAU: Again, because the men were so dominant. They could not say no.

Q: I see. Well, this has been an interesting look into women's issues in that part of the world, but let us move on. After that assignment, you came back into Washington, DC again for a period of five years. You have said that reentry was not difficult for you, however, your husband was Ceylon Desk Officer during this time and your son Jeffrey was born during this time and I would like to hear about whether the Vietnam War affected your lives during this period.

RAU: Not really, we very strongly supported the Government's position, feeling it was the right thing at the right time, but I must tell you, reentry did pose one problem when we came back. My husband was expected to go immediately to work and I was left with being eight months pregnant upon arrival in the States with a little two year old and having to find a place to live. Well, I couldn't rely on my husband because he kept saying "I have to go to the office." I'm not really sure whether this was official or not. So I was left to find a house for us. Well, it was August, very hot in Washington, and I was totally miserable. And so, I would meet with these real estate agents trying to find a house. And finally after two weeks of not being able to find anything, I finally burst into tears on one occasion and said "Donald, you're going to have to take a day off and help me. I can't drag a two year old around Washington while I'm house hunting." So at that point, he really realized that I was having a difficult time and did take a couple of days off to help me find a house.

Q: Was there an AAFSW Housing Desk at the time?



RAU: Not that I was aware of. I'm not sure if there was or not, but we did not use it. We did stay in some temporary lodging that was furnished by the State Department, but that was about the only assistance we actually got from the State Department.

Q: And so then, his work on the Desk - the Vietnam War did not impact on him on the Desk, is that correct?

RAU: No, not really.

Q: After that period of five years, you went to Bern, Switzerland and during this period, which was another four-year period, President Nixon was elected and you, I guess, took up German language training. Tell us if that was useful for you and what your assignment in Bern was like.

RAU: We all loved Bern. It's a wonderful place to be assigned. I did find that my German language training did have some benefits, although a lot of the people, the Swiss speak three or four languages each. But when I would go shopping, it would be helpful and now that we go back every once in a while to visit, I still use my German. But, Bern was just a wonderful, wonderful place. We could travel to Austria and to Germany and to Italy from there and it was a wonderful experience for the whole family.

Q: Were your children both pre-school at that time.

RAU: No they were actually in the English-speaking school of Bern which was just a little tiny building at the time, just getting started. And it was the International School really and they made good friends with a lot of people from different countries which was a real benefit for them.

Q: Was living in Bern very expensive at that time?

RAU: Not in those days. The exchange rate was something like 4.5 to the dollar, so we did very well.

Q: Horror stories exist today and in recent years as you know, it's one of the most expensive cities to live in. But I was curious about when you lived there.

RAU: Not then.



Q: Right towards the last two years of your tour there, something historical happened in that the 1972 Directive was issued and this had a very divisive effect on a lot of spouses in terms of whether or not they feel it benefited or did not benefit them. And of course this is the Directive that sort of reversed long-standing tradition that wives would be evaluated on their husband's performance appraisals and had been expected to be almost an employee of the State Department. And this Directive reversed all that and stopped making the requirements on the spouse. And we're very very interested in your experiences going back to Madras - what it was like and then what it was like after the 1972 Directive was issued.

RAU: Well, of course, when we came into the Foreign Service, it was simply understood that a wife would have an efficiency report written on her along with her husband, that we would entertain - that was part of our husband's job, that we were expected to entertain all his contacts, as many of the local officials as possible. And so we didn't have any choice, it was just assumed that this was our duty. And I did not object. In fact it was a wonderful experience. I met so many many people that are still friends today that we see, that we correspond with, visit back and forth. It was a wonderful introduction to the life of the community wherever we were posted. I did a lot of entertaining. I did a lot of coffees, a lot of lunches, a lot of teas, a lot of receptions, a lot of dinners and yes, it was work, but the benefits, by far, outweigh the inconvenience that was involved. We normally had someone come in and help, although usually I did all the cooking myself - only had someone come in and serve. But I enjoyed it and it was a wonderful way to meet a lot of the local people that I would not have met otherwise. And to this day we still have a lot of friends through our connections that we met entertaining in the Foreign Service. I must say that Tom and Mary Jo Simons were our first principal officers and we were taught to call within 24 hours upon our arrival at post. You wore your white gloves, you presented your card, you stayed 15 minutes to half an hour and you were on call for whatever your principal officer or his wife needed you to do. You always arrived at official functions 15 minutes ahead of time. If it was necessary for you to bring food or drink or furnish something, you did that. When there was a party and they needed help you always appeared. I know when Frances Willis was our Ambassador in Sri Lanka when we were there and she was of the old school. The Sri Lankans were notorious for arriving at parties with either a man without his wife or a wife without a husband, and always coming late. So Frances Willis insisted upon having a complete table. She really was upset if there was an empty seat at her table. So she would always ask an extra embassy couple to come to the dinner and then depending on if a man arrived without his wife, the wife stayed. If the wife came without her husband, the husband stayed. And I know many times I had to stay while Donald went home to fill in the extra place at the table. Because this is one of her things that she just could not tolerate. So I know when I was seven, eight, nine months pregnant in Sri Lanka and the fleet would come in - that's when the naval vessels used to come in for a visit, and we always entertained them - I was expected to be at the reception, on my feet, entertaining, assisting. And she said I expect you to do your duty until you are eight, nine months pregnant. When you're in your last month, you won't have to participate in social affairs. But you were expected to support your principal officer. And again, yes it was inconvenient, but it was also a real learning experience.



Q: So then tell me, what was it like after the 1972 Directive? Did you feel disenfranchised? How did you feel about this change?

RAU: For a lot of gals who had careers and wanted to work overseas, this was a wonderful thing for them - they just really thought this was a wonderful opportunity. However, those of us who had sort of gotten into the tradition of being supportive wives and part of our husband's team, I have to say resented a bit, the fact that this was no longer expected of wives - that they had a duty to do. I was happy to give up the efficiency report side of the bargain, but I always felt that we should have been recognized in some way for doing the things we did. Being involved in local volunteer groups, for entertaining for our husbands which was really above and beyond the call of duty. But among the older wives yes, there was a lot of resentment. And I think perhaps some of it was envy, we envied these young gals who had careers and wanted to pursue them. But we felt that we had done our share and they should too.

Q: I understand that there are awards at Post, volunteer awards that can be given out. I get the impression that maybe the Ambassadors were not aware of these vehicles and maybe didn't know what was going on to the point where they could pick up some of this recognition slack.

RAU: I don't think, that in this period, there was any way. The only way they could do it was through the efficiency report saying this wife had entertained well or entertains frequently or supports her husband, or participates in this. When I was in Australia, the Ambassador there did write a nice letter thanking me for all the effort. And when we were stationed in Hong Kong, the Consul General did thank me for taking some of the Congressional Delegation's wives around, but that was about the extent of it.

Q: And then, after that period of time you went to Kathmandu in 1973 and 1974 and I understand that the scenery there was quite remarkable and also that you spent time as President of the Women's International Club and were a clinic volunteer, so I am interested in hearing about those three things.

RAU: Well, there were a lot of AID missions, but from many, many different countries in Kathmandu trying to help the Nepalese build roads, improve their farming techniques. So there was a huge international community and they had set up a clinic for the local people. Again we had hired a doctor and we dispensed medication, gave advice on birth controls and it was an extremely popular thing for the locals because it didn't cost them anything and they were given free medicine, free medical advice. And we had a clinic that ran every morning. It was very, very popular and it was...



Q: You said this was provided by AID.

RAU: No, the Women's International Club actually ran the clinic.

Q: They provided the funds to hire the doctor?

RAU: Yes, we raised the money, bought the medicine and paid the doctors.

Q: And how did you raise the money?

RAU: We used to have social events that people would pay to attend - an orchestra, band, a fashion show or whatever women do to raise money.

Q: And what sort of attendance at the clinic from the locals - how heavy was it?

RAU: We were very busy. We would probably see at least a hundred people in a morning - men, women and children.

Q: What types of things did you treat them for other than birth control?

RAU: Well, of course, worms and amoebic dysentery were rampant. Then they would come in with minor injuries - a cut foot, or something like that. They'd been in an accident. There was nothing really major, but it was mostly to teach them good hygiene and give them vitamin supplements, things like that.

Q: And what was the society there - was their attitude toward birth control different than India?

RAU: They were a little more receptive than in India. Nepal being a very small country, I think they realized that they just could not have the tremendous number of children that the Indians do. And they would normally limit it to three, four, five maximum where in India it would get up to be 12 or 14 per family.

Q: Was there a caste system at all there?



RAU: Not really, and that was the wonderful part about Nepal. In Nepal you have Buddhists, you have Hindus, you have Christians, you have Muslims and I think it's one of the very, very few countries in the world where they all lived in harmony. They respected each other's religions. There were no religious problems at all and everyone got along very, very well.

Q: What about the scenery. You said Mt. Everest was in view?

RAU: Yes, while we were there I and one of the teachers from the International School took a group of 5th grade girls trekking toward Everest for a week and the scenery is spectacular, the people in the villages where we went through were extremely nice and when word got out that I was a nurse, we seemed to be besieged with people with minor ailments. And unfortunately we didn't have much medical supplies with us, so it was sort of a touch and go situation but it was a wonderful, wonderful experience to get out and see life in the villages.

Q: Moving from Nepal, you went on to Hong Kong and spent a year or two there and during that particular time, in your capacity as a nurse, you helped evacuate children from Vietnam during the fall of Saigon. And you have submitted that to the Collection, in writing and we are going to insert it in this particular place.

RAU: It seems more like a dream now. After all this time, the things that remain the clearest in my memory are the heat and the children's cries.

It has been 20 years since Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese on April 30, 1975, and 20 years since my husband came home from the Consulate General in Hong Kong on that April day and announced that he had volunteered my services for "a project." (He was the Administrative Officer, and we had been living in Hong Kong for six months.)

It seemed that the Consulate General had received a wire from our Embassy in Saigon, asking for volunteers for a mercy mission to save some 425 orphans, whose lives would be in danger from the advancing Viet Cong. The officers at the Consulate General had decided that it would be nice if some American women with nursing experience "volunteered" to fly the orphans to a waiting group of adoptive parents in Seattle. Pan American had donated a Boeing 747 Jumbo Jet for the project.

I must admit that I felt a noticeable lack of enthusiasm. Flying has always been very low on my list of favorite activities; I had houseguests from Switzerland and two small children of my own.

However, "The Project" seemed to take on a life of its own. Before we knew it, 10 of us American RN's living in Hong Kong were at the airport, ready to board the plane for Saigon.



It was an uneventful flight until, just as we were landing, one of the gals, who had obviously done her homework, looked out of the window and exclaimed, "Oh, look! There is the plane that crashed yesterday. It's still smoldering." She was referring to a U.S. military transport plane that had crashed on takeoff the day before, killing all 16 American nurses and 140 of the children on board. It was then that it finally struck me where I was, and that the mission could involve some risk.

This realization was compounded by the pilot's announcing that we were about to land. However, we would not be pulling up to the terminal because there were huge mobs of people at the airport trying to leave Vietnam. We would, therefore, park at the far end of the field, and the children would be brought out in trucks and busses. We would have just one hour to load the plane and leave immediately.

As we opened the doors of the plane to receive the children, the heat took our breath away. It only got hotter as we started to settle the children. They were mostly Amer-Asian, in ages from newborn to about 12 years. Some were terribly quiet; but most were in tears, as if they knew that they probably would never see their homeland again. They had come from orphanages in Saigon and Da Nang and were on their way to waiting American families in the States. Most had new adoptive parents waiting. The more severely handicapped did not.

I particularly remember one little girl of about seven or eight. She was dressed in a bright red silk cheongsam, as if going to a party. She was obviously not from the orphanage. As her mother kept trying to lift her into the plane, they were both crying. The mother pleaded, "please take her. Please take her." So we did.

It was decided to place all the babies one year and under in the First Class section, and the older children in Tourist. We had babies in carriers on the seats, babies under the seats and babies in the aisles. There were about 50 in all, that we managed to step over and around.

Several hours after takeoff, we were in trouble. Diarrhea had struck. It didn't take us long to figure out that the evaporated milk was just too rich for these babies and needed some drastic watering-down.

This was only the beginning. Soon, several of the older children developed smallpox and measles, followed by meningitis. The observation deck became our Isolation Ward. It was rumored that a doctor was on board, but I never did see him. I can only assume that he spent the trip in the Isolation Ward, with the most desperately ill children.



As we neared Guam - where we planned to land and refuel - we discovered that the children were not dressed for the cool Seattle weather. A call was put in to the military base on Guam for help. We arrived to find warm clothing in all sizes and shapes waiting, as well as a much-needed supply of disposable diapers.

Almost 48 hours after leaving Hong Kong, we landed in Seattle. It was difficult to tell who was more apprehensive - the children or their new parents. But the children were met with open arms. Saigon fell about a week later.

Sometimes I wonder what has become of these children. Did they find happy, homes? Do they ever think of Saigon? Did they grow up and find the American dream? And, sometimes, in my dreams, I still feel the heat and hear the children crying.

Q: However, if there is anything else that occurred during your period in Hong Kong, I would like to hear it at this point - especially your escorting Congressional wives in that time frame.

RAU: Well, it was expected that the wives assume this duty of taking the Congressional wives shopping when they would come with their husband. I can remember taking Mrs. Symington and some of the other wives to the various shops and it was just one of the things that wives were expected to do. Fortunately I love to shop so I had a wonderful time.

Q: What sorts of things were available that interested the Congressional wives, I mean were they buying clothes or furniture, or just souvenirs?

RAU: Everything, carpets. Chinese carpets, Chinese furniture. Of course they would have a plane at their disposal which they could fill to capacity and frequently did. But Hong Kong was a wonderful place at that time where you could have anything tailor-made overnight. Jewelry was a wonderful buy, very reasonable. Ivory, jade, all sorts of wonderful treasures.

Q: Do you recall any of the Congressional wives buying anything really spectacular like that. I mean a huge gem or something?

RAU: No, but it used to be a story that when some of them would come, the merchants would always hear about it. And they knew a good thing when they realized the group was coming. As they stayed at the Peninsula Hotel frequently and there would always be a line of little old men outside their hotel rooms laden with fabrics and jewelry and all sorts of wonderful things for them to look at.



Q: The shopping center came to them in other words.

RAU: Exactly, in a lot of instances.

Q: Was there anything else remarkable about your stay in Hong Kong?

RAU: Not really. We were only there a year and that was it mostly.

Annotation: After a year in Washington, the Rau's were posted to Canberra, Australia. The following occurred after their return to Washington four years later:

Q: Well, then it was back to Washington again, and at this point in time you did have a little reentry problem - not personally, but your daughter had some adjusting to make. Could you tell us about that?

RAU: Well, I have a son and a daughter. My daughter is the oldest and she always liked to be very secure in her surroundings. Liked to have family and friends around. And we had moved so many times during her lifespan that I think she missed the family connections and we'd always lived so far away that it was difficult to get to see family on a regular basis. So when we finally got back to the States she was ready for college and she had a bit of a problem finding her little niche. But there was some wonderful counseling by Ann Weiss at the State Department at that time, I think that section was just being established at that time.

Q: What section was that? Family counseling?

RAU: Sort of family counseling. And Ann was wonderful and it didn't take long and Gussie realized that we were back home again and we were going to stay for a while and be in one place for a longer period where she could make friends and see her friends and keep in touch

Now my son was just the opposite. He loves to travel. He's still traveling with a German plastics firm here in Washington. He had no trouble adjusting from one place to the other. Each move seemed to be an adventure for him. But Gussie liked things fairly stable and structured and wanted her friends to be around her.

Q: That leads me to ask, since you were returning to the States where your family lived, why wouldn't that have been a positive event instead of an adjustment for her.



RAU: Because we were in Australia, coming back from Australia where we had lived for four and a half years and she had become very settled there and made some very, very good friends. And met a young man that had asked her to marry him and she didn't want to stay in Australia, but it was a very wrenching experience for her to leave her friends and this young man.

Q: So it was the leaving and not the reentry.

RAU: Right, right.

Q: And you became a refreshed nurse at the University of Virginia, is that right?

RAU: Yes, I took a refresher course and actually worked for several months at one of the hospitals in Virginia. It was a wonderful experience for me to catch up because we had been overseas so long that I had really lost a lot of information and new techniques, so it was a great chance for me to catch up on what was going on in my profession. And my husband was busy traveling with the Security Program to Baghdad and Beirut, so I had some spare time on my hands.

Q: Did you take the class in Washington, DC or did you go to Charlottesville, or where?

RAU: No, it was in one of the suburbs. It was an extension of the University of Virginia.

Q: And did you specialize in some kind of nursing, is that possible or not?

RAU: Well, I was getting ready to go into psychiatric nursing actually. That has always been one of my very favorite fields, but again, at this point our son graduated from high school, received a scholarship to Santa Clara University in California and we decided to move to California.

Q: But not until you went to Canberra.

RAU: Oh, that's right.

Q: And interestingly, of all the exotic places you have been, Canberra posed a cultural adaptation problem for you. Could you tell us about that?



RAU: Well my husband had prepared me so well for India and Ceylon that from what he had told me it was such a pleasant surprise, that it didn't seem quite as bad. But I had done a lot of reading about Australia before we left and I thought that it was going to be just like being in a city in the United States. Everyone spoke English, their capital, Canberra, was built as a capital city, much like our own Washington, DC, and I had assumed that it was going to be just like being at home. Much to my surprise, I discovered very shortly, it was not. Australians are a very male-dominated society. A woman is considered slightly above a household pet I think. It was quite an adjustment for me to realize that women came off as very second class citizens.

Q: Were you offended or insulted, or how did you become aware of that attitude?

RAU: I made a lot of very, very good friends in Canberra. And, it didn't affect me personally, but watching my friends whose husbands, almost to a man, had a mistress which was all right with their wives simply because the divorce conditions were so bad in Australia that a woman was given no rights at all if she would divorce her husband - the man kept all the money, she was literally thrown out on the street. I felt so sorry for them that they were forced to put up with this. And at that time in Australia, the education stopped at high school. The colleges and universities were all State run so that it limited the enrollment. Most of the women were lucky to have received a high school education. Even those whose husbands were very prominent officials and important businessmen, so they really had no recourse. They had to stay home, stay quiet, do as their husbands wanted. And they put up with a lot.

Q: This is shocking considering we are talking about 1980.

RAU: I always used to ask some of my friends "why do you put up with this?" A man's mate was not his wife, it was his male friend. They would frequently go away on weekends together and leave their wives at home. They hung out a lot at the pub where women were not allowed. Women were not allowed in the pub. It was not a really close family existence, and I think this is so different from what Americans were used to that a lot of the women simply couldn't understand why these Australian women would tolerate this. But actually they had very little choice.

Q: Did it affect your husband's behavior at all? (laughter)

RAU: No.

Q: I sometimes find in the company of men like that that it will affect the loner to go over to their side.



RAU: Not really, I think the Australians have quite a reputation for drinking and consuming large amounts of alcohol, and we always had a problem at parties getting them to go home. You had to insist that the food was gone, the beverages were gone, before they would actually leave. And even when the Ambassador entertained, if the party really got going, it was very, very difficult to get these people to go home. And that was one of our jobs as officers with the embassy, we always had to sort of, when the party was over, shoo these people out the door to get them to leave.

Q: I would like to know something about your service on the Board of Dr. Bernardo's Home for Children. Could you fill me in about that?

RAU: Well, Dr. Bernardo's was a group that is run out of England. It takes a lot of the orphan children in England and moves them to Australia - that was how it was originally set up. But now, that is not being done as much. But what they are doing is taking children who come from broken homes, children who do not do well in their own family surroundings, and they actually have quarters for these children to stay with counselors and with caretakers and what they hope to do is when these children reach the age of 18, they hopefully, by then have had their schooling and have learned a trade and they go out into society. So Dr. Bernardo's in Australia is responsible for fundraising, basically, to have the finances to support this home and to take care of these children and give them the proper care that they need.

Q: So they're not necessarily orphans, they have families.

RAU: They also come from - it works as a foster home where if the family situation is not conducive to good home life for them, they can come and spend a certain amount of time at Dr. Bernardo's.

Q: Well, we find that a little strange in that in this country we have the foster homes available, more often than you would hear about independent living as you're describing. So it sounds odd by comparison.

RAU: Yes, the Australian people are not great ones for taking these children into their homes. In fact, we found that even religious - there wasn't a great deal of religious background to life in Australia. Religion just didn't seem to be that important. So, I guess it all fits in with your responsibility to your fellow man that they did not do this. They are not really known for their good works.



Q: So culturally, it would be more common to find a home like this where such children would be living as opposed to foster homes.

RAU: Uh, huh. There was no other place for these children to go.

Q: And what was the success rate.

RAU: The success rate for these children was very, very high. Actually, there is not much crime in Australia which is amazing. So once these children had a trade they were ready to go out and take their place in society.

Q: What about your service as the Program Chairman of the American Embassy Wives?

RAU: Again, this is quite a change from what we had in Switzerland before the mandate became popular. It was more difficult in Australia to get the wives together to attend the embassy wives meetings. They all had their little thing that they did. They were not compelled in any way to attend these meetings so a lot of them just decided that they did not want to become involved. And I, personally, felt that this was a sad situation because I think American women need to get together in certain places and compare notes and talk things over among themselves, whatever. It makes for a less close-knit community when women don't attend meetings and things.

Q: So, you were disappointed when you served in this position that they didn't turn out?

RAU: Yes. We used to have meetings every month. We'd always have entertainment. We'd always have - it was always at the residence, it was always a lovely affair. We tried to get people involved in local affairs, either charities or functions. But, again, some of the women, at this point said, "I don't have to do this," "I'm not interested in doing this," and "I don't want to be involved".

Q: What kind of entertainment or programs did you have to entice them in?



RAU: Well, we would have local - Australia is very well known for it's arts and crafts, it has wonderful arts and crafts. And, in fact I took pottery classes while we lived there. We used to take, again, the Congressional wives out to visit some of the very well known craftsmen in their studios when they would come. So, we would have a lot of the craftsmen come in and give a presentation. We would have jewelry, precious stones are mined there. We would have some of the jewelry smiths come in and talk. We would have presentations on Aboriginal life. Things pertaining to life in Australia which I found very interesting and I think would be beneficial to people living there.

Q: Okay. Reentry. Again, in 1980 to 1984 and during this time Ronald Reagan was in office and starting with the Iran Hostage Crisis. This was a difficult period for you because of your husband's involvement in going to Beirut and your children being of college age and I would like to start off talking about that please.

RAU: Well, my husband was the Deputy Director of the Security Enhancement Program at this time and this was about the time that things were really heating up in Beirut and Baghdad. So he would have to go, frequently, to the overseas post to make sure that their security measures were sufficient. And both children were getting ready to go to college. Jeff had just received a scholarship to Santa Clara University in California and we knew we were going to retire fairly soon, so it fell on my shoulders to close up the house in Washington, to move the family to California and get a house there and to start both children in college. At the time it didn't seem so awesome, but looking back at it, I think that it was a lot of involvement on my part in their getting settled. And fortunately, they both did very well.

Q: It reminds me of when you had the initial reentry into DC and you had a baby and your husband was so involved with the office. And that you were on your own during that particular reentry period. And here it is so many years later and it's like he's off again, the job is calling and you've got major household decisions and educational decisions to make.

RAU: Well, its very strange. I tend to give my husband a little bit of a bad time about the fact that whenever I needed him, he was never there. He always had to go to the office. It was some emergency brewing that he had to be away from home for. So, it seemed like I was always the one who did all the packing, all the unpacking, all the settling in and he was always busy at the office. But that's just the way it was, so we learned to live with it.

Q: Have you noticed, in recent years that they have implemented more family friendly policies? For example, leave for "paternity" so husbands can come home and help with the children. It seems as though society is changing from what you experienced.



RAU: Yes, and I think some of that is definitely a step in the right direction. Yes, work is very important, but I think, in some of these instances that also the family needs need to be considered.

Q: Then, as luck would have it, the Medical Division you applied to and were hired as the nurse. And you said that during that period of time it was quite unusual for a spouse to be hired. Would you elaborate on that?

RAU: A lot of women did not work, have positions in the State Department. The wives were not offered a position, or asked to even apply for a position. And I just did it because I simply felt that I had been out of my field for too long and needed to get back in and get caught up with things that were going on. So I was very bold at the time and actually went to the State Department and asked them if they had a position in the clinic that needed a nurse. And I was very, very fortunate in the fact that I was hired and enjoyed it immensely. It gave me a wonderful opportunity to communicate with people who were going overseas to posts where I had been. They used to pick my brain and I could give them some helpful information. I did catch up on a lot of lost learning time and I think it was very helpful for me to realize that my State Department, that I had given so many years to, without receiving any sort of reward in return, was willing to give me, offer me a position where I could actually do some service.

Q: But you said it wasn't the practice to seek out spouses?

RAU: Definitely not!

Q: What do you make of that?

RAU: I think if a spouse really wants to work and there is a position available that she would qualify for, that that really should be encouraged. Although I must admit I am a bit old fashioned - I feel that if you marry a Foreign Service Officer, you also marry the Foreign Service, and that implies that you do a fair share of entertaining, of meeting the local people, of becoming involved in local affairs to whatever ability you have. It not only enhances the Foreign Service reputation overseas, but gives a great deal of pleasure to the person and it also helps you become a great deal more knowledgeable about the area that you're stationed in. And to this day I have many wonderful, wonderful friends that we see, communicate with on a regular basis, all over the world that I never would have met had I not become involved in local affairs.

Q: Were you aware that our founder, Jewell Fenzi, had written a book by that very title called "Married to the Foreign Service?"



RAU: Yes (laughter). But I always felt that I was married to the Foreign Service.

Q: You knew it in your heart! Then you told me that you moved to California a full two years before your husband retired, so you were definitely an independent woman carrying a heavy load.

RAU: Yes, but you know, when you do these things, it doesn't seem that strenuous at the time. You do things because it's required and you are expected to and it all worked out very well.

Q: But California was not your home state. I recall you said you came from Wisconsin.

RAU: Wisconsin, yes, But we had come through California many times in and out of the United States and the children's Godparents live there. So we just decided that California was a wonderful place. No air conditioning, no heat most of the year and all the wonderful fresh fruits and vegetables that were available.

Q: The climate attracted you?

RAU: Oh, it was wonderful, and it still is.

Q: So, now you've been retired for thirteen years - that's a long time.

RAU: Yes, and I miss the travel. I miss being in different countries, seeing different things. But we still travel a lot. We just completed a trip to Sri Lanka where I was fortunate enough to see a friend that I had not seen in 35 years and she met my daughter for the first time and it was a wonderful reunion.

Q: But your son ended up moving back East after being educated in California and where did your daughter end up?

RAU: She lives in California. She works for the California State University - Monterey Bay in human resources. And she lives very near us and we are very fortunate to have her near us. But my son works for a German plastics firm here in Leesburg.



Q: This pretty much covers your life in the Foreign Service. And in looking back on it is there anything you would have done differently?

RAU: I definitely would have sought better medical facilities at the time I was pregnant. Or made sure that they were available somehow. But other than that, I really can't think of anything. I enjoyed all of it.

Q: Were there no dragon ladies in your experiences?

RAU: Well, there were principal officers who expected a lot from their junior officers. But they taught us a lot about service, they taught us a lot about the Foreign Service, they were wonderful examples to all of us. I have some very happy memories of things they did. And again, it was the way we were brought up in the Foreign Service to serve. So it was not unexpected that these demands be placed upon us. I'll never forget one time when we were in Madras we had gone to the Simons', the Principal Officer, for dinner and it was our first formal affair in the Foreign Service and my husband had a brand new tuxedo and he'd never worn it before, so we arrived early as was expected, 15 minutes before the other guests. And we were sitting talking to Tom and Mary Jo and they happened to look down and my husband still had the label on the sleeve of his dinner jacket. And Tom Simons got up very quietly, without saying a word, and got his scissors and clipped off the price tag from my husband's dinner jacket! (laughter) So, there were some wonderful experiences and not many that really were difficult.

Q: I'll tell you I enjoyed this interview and I admire you for your flexibility, which believe me is very rare - how you've gotten through so many assignments and so many reentries - and kept a sense of humor and appreciated it as you went along - and have had happy assignments and a happy retirement. I congratulate you on all of that. I certainly have enjoyed this interview. Thank you so much!

RAU: Thank you - it's been my pleasure to come in and talk to you.

### \*\*\*BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Donald E. Rau

Spouse Entered Service: 9/58 Left Service: 1/84 You Entered Service: 9/58 Left Service: 1/84

Status: Spouse of Retiree



Spouse's Position: Consular & Political officer & Administrative Counselor

Place/Date of birth: Baraboo, Wisconsin; September 19, 1934

Maiden Name: Gibbons

Schools (Prep, University): Columbia School of Nursing, 1952-1955

Profession: R.N.

Date/Place of Marriage: Baraboo, Wisconsin; September 8, 1957

Positions held (Please specify Volunteer or Paid): At Post: Madras, India - Membership Chairman, American Womens' Club; Volunteer at Harijan Village Clinic; President of Womens' International Club in Kathmandu - Volunteer at same; On Board of Dr. Barnard's Home for Children in Canberra, Australia; Program Chairman - American Embassy Wives, Canberra.

In Washington, DC: R.N. at Medical Branch/Dept. of State 1981-1983.

End of Interview